

Personality Politics and Electoral Success in India: An Analysis of BJP's Dominance in the Hindi Heartland States

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ABSTRACT

Personality politics refers to a political environment or situation where the personal attributes, characteristics, and charisma of individual leaders play a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing political outcomes. In personality-driven politics, the focus often shifts from policy issues and party platforms to the personal qualities of political figures. This paper provides an analytical study of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral dominance in the Hindi heartland states through the lens of personality politics. Focusing on the charismatic leadership, strategic communication, and political strategies employed by the BJP, particularly with the prominence of leaders like Narendra Modi, the research seeks to unravel the complex interplay between personality-driven politics and electoral success. Further this analysis delves into the ways in which the party's leaders shape political narratives, connect with voters, and navigate the diverse socio-cultural landscape of the states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan. The study also explores the implications of personality politics for democratic governance, political culture, and the evolving nature of electoral dynamics in the Hindi heartland. Thus based on the secondary sources, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors driving the BJP's sustained dominance in this crucial region of Indian politics.

Keywords: *Personality Politics, Charisma, Electoral Dominance, Hindi Heartland, Leadership*

Introduction

Personality politics refers to a political landscape in which the personal attributes, charisma, and image of individual leaders play a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing political decisions. In such a context, the focus shifts from policy issues, ideologies, or party platforms to the personal qualities of political figures. This phenomenon is often characterized by a heightened emphasis on the leader's personality, communication style, and perceived authenticity.

One key aspect of personality politics is the role of charisma. Charismatic leaders possess qualities that inspire and captivate the public. These may include effective communication skills, charm, confidence, and a compelling presence. Voters are drawn to leaders who can articulate a vision with conviction, connect emotionally, and project an image of strength and decisiveness. Charisma can create a personal connection between leaders and their followers, transcending traditional political divides (Levinson, 1958).

In a personality-driven political environment, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of leaders. The visual and narrative elements of a leader's image become central to their political identity. Political campaigns often prioritize creating a relatable and appealing personality for candidates, utilizing advertising, social media, and public appearances to craft a specific image. This focus on personality can sometimes overshadow substantive policy discussions, as candidates strive to present a likable and relatable persona.

The rise of personality politics is also linked to the era of 24-hour news cycles and the dominance of social media. In an age of information overload, concise and attention-grabbing narratives about individuals tend to capture

public attention more effectively than complex policy discussions. This has led to a trend where political discourse becomes increasingly centred on the personal lives, behaviours, and character of leaders, sometimes at the expense of in-depth analysis of policy proposals (Tucker, 1977).

However, the prominence of personality politics raises concerns about the long-term health of democratic systems. When elections become primarily about the appeal of individuals rather than the merits of their ideas, there is a risk of superficial decision-making. Voters may be swayed by emotions and charisma rather than a careful evaluation of policy positions. Additionally, the cult of personality around a leader can contribute to the erosion of institutional checks and balances, as strong leaders may consolidate power at the expense of democratic principles (Immelman, 1993).

Personality politics can also create a polarized political environment. As individuals align themselves with charismatic leaders, political discourse may become more divisive, focusing on loyalty to a particular figure rather than a commitment to shared values or policy goals. This polarization can hinder constructive dialogue and compromise, impeding the ability of governments to address complex challenges effectively.

In summary, personality politics is a phenomenon where the personal attributes and charisma of individual leaders take precedence over policy issues and party platforms. Charisma, media portrayal, and the impact of social media contribute to the prominence of personality in political decision-making. While charismatic leaders can inspire and mobilize the public, an excessive focus on personality over substance poses challenges to the health of democratic processes and the pursuit of well-informed decision-making. Striking a balance between recognizing the importance of leadership qualities and maintaining a focus on substantive policy discussions is crucial for the robust functioning of democratic societies.

Whether Personality Politics Leading to Electoral Success in India?

Personality politics has played a significant role in Indian electoral politics, and its impact on electoral success has varied over time and across different regions. India is known for its diverse and dynamic political landscape, shaped by a multitude of factors such as caste, religion, regional identities, and socio-economic considerations. In this complex environment, the role of personalities, charisma, and the image of political leaders cannot be underestimated.

1. Role of Key Personalities:

India has witnessed the rise of charismatic leaders who have left a lasting impact on the political landscape. Figures like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and more recently, Narendra Modi, have had a profound influence on Indian politics. These leaders have managed to establish a personal connection with the masses, transcending traditional party lines and ideologies.

Narendra Modi, in particular, has been a significant proponent of personality politics. His ability to connect with the masses through effective communication, strong leadership, and a carefully crafted public image has contributed to his electoral success. The "Modi wave" in the 2014 general elections and the subsequent victories in state elections underscore the influence of personality politics in India (Tharoor, 2020).

2. Cult of Personality:

Personality politics in India often leads to the development of a cult of personality around certain leaders. This is evident in the way political campaigns and narratives are built around the persona of key leaders. The extensive use of social media, public rallies, and mass communication amplifies the leader's image, creating a larger-than-life perception that resonates with voters.

However, it is important to note that the cult of personality is not universal across the country. Different states and regions have distinct political dynamics, and the success of personality politics varies accordingly. In some regions, local leaders with strong personalities may dominate the political scene, while in others; national leaders may have a more significant impact (Shekhawat, 2005).

3. Regional Variations:

India's federal structure and regional diversity contribute to variations in the impact of personality politics. While national leaders like Modi may have a Pan-Indian appeal, regional leaders often wield significant influence in their respective states. For instance, leaders like Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, Naveen Patnaik in Odisha, and Jagan Mohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh have built strong regional bases through a combination of political acumen and personal charisma.

In states with a strong regional identity, voters may prioritize leaders who align with their cultural and linguistic sentiments. Personality politics, in such cases, is intertwined with regional identities and local issues (Mishra,

2023).

4. Policy and Performance:

While personality politics can create initial voter enthusiasm and mobilization, sustained electoral success also depends on governance, policy decisions, and performance. Voters are likely to evaluate leaders based on their ability to address pressing issues, deliver on promises, and navigate complex challenges.

Narendra Modi's electoral successes, for instance, have been attributed not only to his charismatic appeal but also to the emphasis on governance, development, and economic reforms. The combination of a charismatic leader with a narrative of decisive leadership and development-oriented policies has proven effective in garnering electoral support (Tharoor, 2020).

5. Social Media and Image Building:

The advent of social media has significantly influenced the dynamics of personality politics in India. Political leaders leverage platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to connect directly with voters, shape their public image, and control the narrative. This direct communication allows leaders to bypass traditional media channels and establish a more personalized connection with the electorate.

However, social media can also be a double-edged sword, as negative narratives and criticism can spread rapidly. Effective image management involves not only projecting a positive persona but also managing and responding to criticism in a way that maintains credibility.

6. Challenges and Risks:

While personality politics can contribute to electoral success, it also poses challenges and risks. Overreliance on a leader's persona may lead to a lack of focus on critical policy debates. Moreover, if a leader fails to meet public expectations or faces controversies, it can erode the carefully crafted image, impacting electoral prospects.

The concentration of power in the hands of a charismatic leader can also raise concerns about democratic accountability. In a healthy democracy, institutions and checks and balances should play a crucial role alongside individual leadership.

In summary, personality politics has played a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes in India. Leaders who effectively connect with the masses, build a strong public image, and address the aspirations of diverse communities have seen electoral success. However, the dynamics are complex, and the impact of personality politics varies across regions, communities, and over time. Additionally, sustained success requires a balance between effective image building and a commitment to governance, policy, and performance. The evolving nature of Indian politics ensures that the interplay between personalities and electoral success will continue to be a significant aspect of the country's political landscape.

Factors that Influence a Party to Come into Power in the Hindi Heartland States

The Hindi heartland states in India, often considered the political nerve center of the country, encompass several key states where political dynamics play a crucial role in determining which party comes into power. These states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan, are characterized by their substantial Hindi-speaking population and significant electoral weight. Several factors influence the electoral outcomes in these states, shaping the political landscape and determining which party gains power.

1. Caste Dynamics:

Caste has historically been a pivotal factor in the politics of the Hindi heartland. The intricate web of caste affiliations and identities plays a significant role in shaping voting patterns. Political parties often strategize and form alliances based on caste equations to consolidate their support base. Parties that successfully navigate and appeal to different caste groups stand a better chance of securing electoral victories.

In Uttar Pradesh, for example, where caste dynamics are particularly complex, parties often form coalitions to consolidate votes from various caste groups. The ability to create a broad-based social coalition that cuts across caste lines is a key determinant of electoral success (Sen, 2012).

2. Religious Identity:

Religious considerations also play a significant role in the politics of the Hindi heartland. Issues related to religious identity, communal harmony, and the perceived protection of religious interests often influence voter behaviour. Parties that effectively address these concerns and appeal to the religious sentiments of the electorate can gain an advantage.

Communal polarization, unfortunately, has been exploited by some parties to consolidate their vote banks. The ability to strike a balance between promoting religious identity and maintaining social harmony is crucial for a

party's success in these states (Sharma, Devi & Verma, 2012).

3. Regionalism and Identity Politics:

Many Hindi heartland states have distinct regional identities and concerns. Parties that understand and address these regional aspirations are likely to fare better in elections. Regional issues, language, and cultural sentiments often play a significant role in shaping political preferences.

For instance, in states like Bihar and Jharkhand, which have a history of regional movements, the ability to connect with regional aspirations and concerns is crucial. Parties that are seen as champions of local interests and identities can gain substantial support (Sattar, 2011).

4. Farmer Issues and Rural Development:

Agriculture is a significant component of the economy in the Hindi heartland, and issues related to farmers and rural development carry considerable weight. Policies and promises related to agricultural growth, irrigation, rural infrastructure, and farmer welfare can significantly influence voting behaviour.

Agricultural distress or successful implementation of pro-farmer policies can swing votes in favour of a particular party. Parties that effectively communicate their commitment to addressing rural issues and improving the livelihoods of farmers often gain electoral traction (Stone, 2011).

5. Economic Development and Employment:

The aspirations for economic development and employment opportunities are universal concerns. Parties that present credible plans for economic growth, industrialization, and job creation are likely to find favour among voters. Unemployment rates and the overall economic well-being of the population play a critical role in shaping electoral outcomes.

In states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which have significant rural and tribal populations, development policies that bridge urban-rural disparities and address the needs of diverse communities are crucial for electoral success (Singh, 2015).

6. Leadership and Personality Cults:

The charisma and leadership qualities of political figures often influence voting patterns. Strong leaders, who can connect with the masses, communicate effectively, and project a positive image are more likely to sway public opinion. Personality politics, as discussed earlier, is a notable factor in these states.

Leaders who are perceived as decisive and capable of addressing the diverse challenges faced by the population tend to enjoy greater electoral success. The ability to build a personality cult and maintain a positive public image is a valuable asset for political parties (Tharoor, 2020).

7. Social Welfare Schemes and Populism:

The implementation of social welfare schemes and populist measures can significantly impact electoral outcomes. Parties that roll out targeted schemes addressing the needs of marginalized communities, women, and economically disadvantaged sections often gain electoral support.

Populist measures, while criticized for their short-term focus, can create a positive perception among voters. However, sustainable development policies are equally crucial for long-term electoral success (Singh, 2015).

8. Anti-Incumbency and Governance:

Anti-incumbency sentiments, reflecting dissatisfaction with the ruling party's performance, are a recurring theme in elections. The effectiveness of governance, delivery of public services, and the ability to fulfil electoral promises all contribute to shaping voter perceptions.

Parties that can convince the electorate of their ability to govern effectively and address public grievances are better positioned to capitalize on anti-incumbency sentiments and secure electoral victories (Gaffar, 2016).

9. Media and Communication Strategies:

The role of media, both traditional and social, cannot be overlooked. Effective communication strategies, media campaigns, and the ability to control the narrative are essential for influencing public opinion. Political parties invest heavily in shaping their image through media management and public relations.

Social media, in particular, has emerged as a powerful tool for political communication, allowing parties to connect directly with voters, especially the youth.

In summary, the political landscape of the Hindi heartland states is shaped by a complex interplay of caste dynamics, religious considerations, regional identities, economic factors, leadership qualities, and governance performance. Successful political parties in these states are those that can navigate these complexities, form strategic alliances, and address the diverse concerns of the electorate. As India's political landscape continues to

evolve, understanding and effectively responding to the intricate factors at play in the Hindi heartland will remain crucial for any party aspiring to come into power in these influential states (Singh, 2013).

Personality Politics: Understanding the BJP's Rise in Hindi Heartland States

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as a dominant force in Indian politics, particularly in the Hindi-speaking heartland. While factors like ideology, organization, and economic policies contribute to their success, the role of personality cannot be understated. Charismatic leaders with deep connections to the socio-cultural fabric of these states have played a pivotal role in shaping public perception and mobilizing voters. Let us delve into this complex interplay of personality and politics, drawing insights from recent electoral victories in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan.

1. Uttar Pradesh: Yogi Adityanath's Hindutva Persona

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, has witnessed the BJP's meteoric rise under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath. A firebrand Hindu monk known for his Hindutva ideology, Adityanath's persona resonates deeply with the state's majority Hindu population. His image as a strong leader, coupled with his emphasis on Hindu cultural revivalism and temple construction, strikes a chord with voters seeking a sense of cultural pride and security.

Adityanath's ability to connect with rural voters through his simple lifestyle and focus on issues like cow protection and anti-Romeo squads also contributes to his appeal. While his critics raise concerns about his divisive rhetoric and handling of minority communities, there is no denying the potent role his personality plays in mobilizing the BJP's core base in Uttar Pradesh (Prasad & Nooruddin, 2019).

2. Madhya Pradesh: Shivraj Singh Chouhan's 'Vikas Purush' Image

In contrast to Adityanath's Hindutva-driven persona, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the three-time Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, has cultivated an image of a 'Vikas Purush' (development man). His focus on infrastructure development, particularly rural roads and irrigation projects, has resonated with voters seeking economic improvement. Chouhan's ability to connect with local communities through his frequent tours and public outreach programs has also cemented his popularity.

While facing anti-incumbency in the 2018 elections, Chouhan successfully countered it by highlighting his developmental record and presenting himself as a leader who understands the needs of the people. His personal connect with voters, particularly in rural areas, played a crucial role in the BJP's comeback victory (Mohan & Pathak, 2023).

In 2023 election, it is important to clarify that Mohan Yadav (from BJP) did not participate in the Madhya Pradesh election as a candidate. However, he assumed a pivotal role after the election as the newly appointed Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh on December 11, 2023. Here are the following reasons for which he became a key figure:

Unexpected Choice:

- Yadav's selection as Chief Minister surprised many as he was not considered a front runner. He was a three-time MLA from Ujjain but not in the highest ranks of the BJP leadership.
- This surprise move was seen as a strategic decision by the party to appeal to different demographics. Yadav belongs to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), a significant vote bank in Madhya Pradesh. By appointing him, the BJP aimed to consolidate OBC support and counter the Congress traditionally stronghold on this community.

Unifying Figure:

- Yadav's relatively low profile and lack of factional affiliations within the BJP made him a more acceptable choice to various party factions. His appointment was seen as a move to bridge internal divisions and present a united front.
- His clean image and reputation as a hardworking, grassroots leader further aided his acceptance among party members and a section of the public.

Challenges and Prospects:

- Yadav faces the crucial task of living up to expectations and delivering on the BJP's promises. He inherits a state facing challenge like rural distress, unemployment, and farmer discontent.
- His success will depend on his ability to tackle these issues effectively, address regional disparities, and maintain party unity. He also needs to build his public image and establish himself as a capable leader.

Overall, while Mohan Yadav was not directly involved in the Madhya Pradesh election 2023, his unexpected appointment as Chief Minister in its aftermath has positioned him as a key figure in the state's political landscape. His success or failure will have significant implications for the BJP's future in Madhya Pradesh (Tiwari & Singh, 2023).

3. Chhattisgarh: Raman Singh's Legacy and Bhupesh Baghel's Rise

Chhattisgarh presents a different dynamic. Raman Singh, the BJP's longest-serving Chief Minister, built his popularity on efficient governance and rural development initiatives. However, anti-incumbency and fatigue with his 15-year rule led to the Congress's victory in 2018 under Bhupesh Baghel's leadership. Baghel, a tribal leader with a humble background, connected with voters by focusing on social welfare schemes and tribal rights.

While the BJP remains a strong force in Chhattisgarh, Baghel's personality and focus on social justice issues have helped consolidate the Congress's position. The state's political landscape showcases how strong leadership personalities can swing voter sentiment in either direction (Yadav, 2023). Despite this, Vishnu Deo Sai played a pivotal role in the Chhattisgarh 2023 election for the BJP, leading them to victory and ultimately becoming the state's first tribal Chief Minister. The following are a breakdown of his contributions:

Prominent Tribal Face:

- Being a tribal himself, Sai attracted significant support from the tribal community, which constitutes a sizable demographic in Chhattisgarh. His deep understanding of their concerns and issues resonated with many voters.
- This helped the BJP counter the Congress' traditional stronghold among tribal communities, especially considering Ajit Jogi, the previous tribal Chief Minister, had lost his ST status in 2019.

Experienced Politician:

- Sai boasts a long and successful political career, serving as a four-time Lok Sabha MP and the state BJP president from 2020 to 2022. This extensive experience provided him with valuable political acumen and a strong network within the party.
- His experience as a Union Minister of State for Steel, Mines, Labour and Employment further bolstered his image as a capable leader with administrative expertise.

Effective Campaigner:

- Sai actively campaigned across the state, connecting with voters and effectively communicating the BJP's manifesto. He emphasized issues like rural development, tribal welfare, and agricultural reforms, aligning with the concerns of many citizens.
- His affable personality and low-profile image were seen as assets, contrasting with the perceived incumbency fatigue towards the Congress government.

Ultimately, Vishnu Deo Sai's combination of tribal identity, political experience and effective campaigning proved instrumental in the BJP's victory in the 2023 Chhattisgarh election. His role was crucial in mobilizing key demographics, countering the Congress, and leading the party to power, culminating in his historic appointment as the state's first tribal Chief Minister (Times of India, 2024).

4. Rajasthan: Vasundhara Raje's Charisma and Ashok Gehlot's Grassroots Connect

Rajasthan, with its diverse social landscape, has seen the BJP and Congress alternate in power over the past two decades. Vasundhara Raje, a Rajput leader known for her regal persona and administrative acumen, led the BJP to victory in 2013. Her popularity stemmed from her image as a decisive and efficient leader who could attract investments and promote development.

However, the Congress's Ashok Gehlot, known for his grassroots connect and focus on social welfare programs, wrested power in 2018. Gehlot's ability to mobilize the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) through targeted schemes proved vital in the BJP's defeat (Shastri, 2023). Rajasthan demonstrates how leadership personalities can appeal to different segments of the electorate based on their social identities and economic aspirations. While Bhajan Lal Sharma played a significant role in the 2023 Rajasthan election and became the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, it is crucial to distinguish between his candidacy and overall impact on the BJP's victory.

As a Candidate:

- Sharma, a first-time BJP candidate from the Sanganer constituency, secured a convincing victory against his Congress opponent.
- This win in what was traditionally a BJP stronghold further solidified the party's hold in certain pockets of Jaipur.
- His victory also contributed to the overall tally of BJP seats, pushing them closer to a majority.

Overall, Bhajan Lal Sharma played a multifaceted role in the 2023 Rajasthan election. While his individual victory contributed to the BJP's tally, his extensive organizational experience, network within the party, and potential strategic positioning for a larger role were equally important factors in the party's overall success.

It's worth noting that Sharma's appointment as Chief Minister has been confirmed as of December 12, 2023, further underlining his crucial role in the BJP's victory and future leadership in Rajasthan (Times of India, 2024).

Conclusion

The BJP's success in Hindi-speaking states cannot be solely attributed to personality. Factors like effective party organization, Hindutva ideology, and economic policies also play a significant role. In conclusion, the BJP's rise to power in Hindi-speaking states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan is a complex interplay of leadership personalities, strategic political manoeuvring, and effective governance. The party's ability to address regional concerns, connect with the electorate on a personal level, and project a strong and decisive leadership has been instrumental in shaping electoral outcomes in these states. While each state has its unique socio-political dynamics, the common threads of nationalism, developmental focus, and organizational strength run through the BJP's success story in the Hindi heartland.

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